

THE LEONARD LETTER

October 17, 2005

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

*"If we ever forget that we're one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under."
--- Ronald Reagan*

AROUND THE STATE

*****Capitol Relevance*****

Sacramento Bee columnist Dan Walters wrote Friday about the findings of veteran legislative staffer Peter Detwiler about the productivity of the legislature and governor from the first term of Reagan's governorship to the present. Detwiler's numbers show that during Reagan's two terms, Jerry Brown's tenure and George Deukmejian's eight years, the legislature passed about 1500 bills per year, sometimes reaching up to 2000. Then in the late 1990s, during Pete Wilson's term, legislative output began declining, and during the most recent session only 961 bills were passed, the lowest since 1967. At the same time, the percentage of vetoes has risen. Walters seems dismayed that there were only 729 new laws this year; I am dismayed that there were that many. No doubt the legislature is failing to serve the people of California, but success cannot be measured in the quantity of bills signed into law. The fact that the legislature is spending its time on what Walters calls "relatively trivial matters" while neglecting to address the larger issues plaguing our state is an indictment of the current system. Rather than judge the legislature on bill production there needs to be a standard that accounts for the quality of legislation and the ability of the legislature to focus on big issues of genuine interest to the public. And if we cannot do that, then perhaps we can just thank the legislators of 2005 for sending fewer bills to the Governor, wasting less of his time and saving our pocketbooks as well.

*****More On the Uninsured*****

I have seen more reaction from last week's piece on medically uninsured Californians than anything I have written in recent memory, which I welcome very much. It signals to me that it is a policy area that begs for more attention from lawmakers. It is not as if there is a dearth of good ideas out there. I was very surprised to hear from a relative who said she was able to find insurance online through a farmers association. She had to pay \$50.00 a year to the association as a non-producing member along with a fee to Nationwide Insurance for what amounted to coverage for basic health care including doctor visits for a very small co-pay-- something like \$30 - \$40 a month three years ago. She reports that there were plenty of options for singles and families then -- all found with a simple Google search. This is the kind of model I would like to see more of. Reasonably priced products where individuals and families can join regardless of employer.

A local blog re-ran last week's piece which elicited a number of excellent comments there:
<http://rosevilleconservative.blogspot.com/2005/10/very-good-commentary-from-boe-member.html>

A couple of these commenters present anecdotal evidence that some are intentionally forgoing coverage through their employer knowing that if they use Medi-Cal instead then they will not even have a co-pay. This is not a surprise. When you subsidize something like "free" health care, you get more of it. Hard to blame people for being informed consumers. Those who say government needs to be part of the solution to the problem of uninsured Californians -- I agree. Government needs to reform itself so only the very needy get free health care.

***** Voter Awareness Week*****

As ten of thousands of young American serve in our military, so many of them fighting to expand liberty and democracy in Iraq, we need to urge their peers on U.S. soil to register to vote. We should concentrate our encouragement during Voter Awareness Week, October 24-28. The emphasis of the week will be to get 18-year-old high school students registered. If you know young people who have just turned 18 or will be doing so soon, get a voter registration form for them (available at http://www.ss.ca.gov/elections/elections_vr.htm) and explain to them how their attention to civic affairs and participation in election is a responsibility they should fulfill. If you would like to be involved in that effort on a larger scale, I encourage you to check out the great work of Let's Vote America at www.letsvoteamerica.com.

MISCELLANY

*****A Good Read*****

One of my favorite television shows is "CSI." I am fascinated by the use of technology to unlock mysteries and solve crimes. But I got to thinking recently that most of the crimes that occur do not need such high-tech approaches. In fact, we would be better off if crimes were prevented rather than solved after that fact. That reminded me of the book "Let's Take Back Our Streets!" by Reuben Greenberg, the Chief of Police in Charleston, South Carolina, with Arthur Gordon. Greenberg retired as at the end of last summer; during his years as police chief, the city's population increased 64% and crime decreased 11%. His book is a no-nonsense look at why criminals do what they do and what both the police and law-abiding citizens can do about that. For example, he describes how he deals with a common drug pusher: "Wherever Johnny the Pusher goes during his 'business' hours, the cop goes, too. He doesn't arrest Johnny, even though he knows he is probably carrying narcotics. No probable cause. So when Johnny goes to Eddie's Bar and Grill, his favorite turf, the cop goes also. He does nothing, just stands there twenty feet from Johnny. Customers may come in, but they don't linger when they see a cop. They don't even say hi to Johnny. They go away and they probably won't come back." Chief Greenberg talks about crime and its perpetrators the way you do around the dinner table. It is refreshing and enlightening. While he and I disagree about the use of handguns for self-defense, I applaud his understanding of the complexities of criminal behavior and the challenges our society faces in confronting it.

BOE AND LEGISLATIVE DATES

October 10 - November 1, 2005 --- Voters may apply for absentee ballots for the November 8th special election.

October 18, 2005 --- BoE meets with County Assessors in Monterey.

October 18, 2005 --- Last day for sample ballots to be mailed to all voters who were registered by September 9th.

October 24, 2005 --- Last day to register to vote in the statewide special election.

October 25-26, 2005 --- Taxpayers' Bill of Rights Hearing in Sacramento along with BOE hearings.

November 1, 2005---BOE meeting in San Diego.

November 8, 2005 --- Statewide special election.

November 11, 2005 --- Veterans' Day.

November 14-16, 2005 --- BOE meeting in Sacramento.

November 24, 2005 --- Thanksgiving Day.

NOTABLE DATES/ HISTORY

October 17, 1781 --- Cornwallis was defeated at Yorktown.

October 17, 1931 --- Al Capone was convicted of tax evasion and sentenced to 11 years in prison.

October 17, 1933 --- Albert Einstein arrived in the U.S., a refugee from Nazi Germany.

October 17, 1989 --- An Earthquake in San Francisco (6.9M) killed 67 people and canceled the third game of 86th World Series.

October 18, 1867 --- The U.S. took formal possession of Alaska from Russia (\$7.2 million).

October 19, 1968 --- The Golden Gate Bridge charged tolls only for southbound cars.

October 20, 1988 --- Los Angeles became the first city to have both basketball and baseball champs as the LA Dodgers beat the Oakland A's, four games to one in the 85th World Series.

October 21, 1917 --- The first Americans entered combat in World War I when units from the U.S. Army's First Division were assigned to Allied trenches at Sommervillier in the Lunéville sector near Nancy, France. Four months earlier, on June 26, 1917, the first U.S. infantry troops, numbering some 14,000 soldiers, had landed in France at the port of Saint Nazaire.

October 22, 1962 --- President John F. Kennedy imposed a naval blockade on Cuba, beginning the missile crisis.

October 23, 1924 --- The first radio network broadcast was received on the U.S. Pacific Coast. The broadcast was a 45-minute speech by President Calvin Coolidge at the dedication of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States Building in Washington, D.C.

October 23, 1944 --- The World War II Battle of Leyte Gulf began.

October 23, 1987 --- The U.S. Senate rejected, 58-to-42, the Supreme Court nomination of Robert H. Bork.

GENERAL TAX INFORMATION

For answers to your general tax questions, call the Board of Equalization information center. Customer service representatives are available to help you from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Pacific time, Monday through Friday (except state holidays).

Toll-free number: 800-400-7115
TDD service for the hearing impaired
TDD phones: 800-735-2929
Voice phones: 800-735-2922

To reach the Taxpayer Rights Advocate's office for assistance with any BOE issues, see <http://www.boe.ca.gov/tra/tra.htm>, or call toll-free 1-888-324-2798.

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